WHIRRAKEE

June 2005 Vol. 26 No. 5

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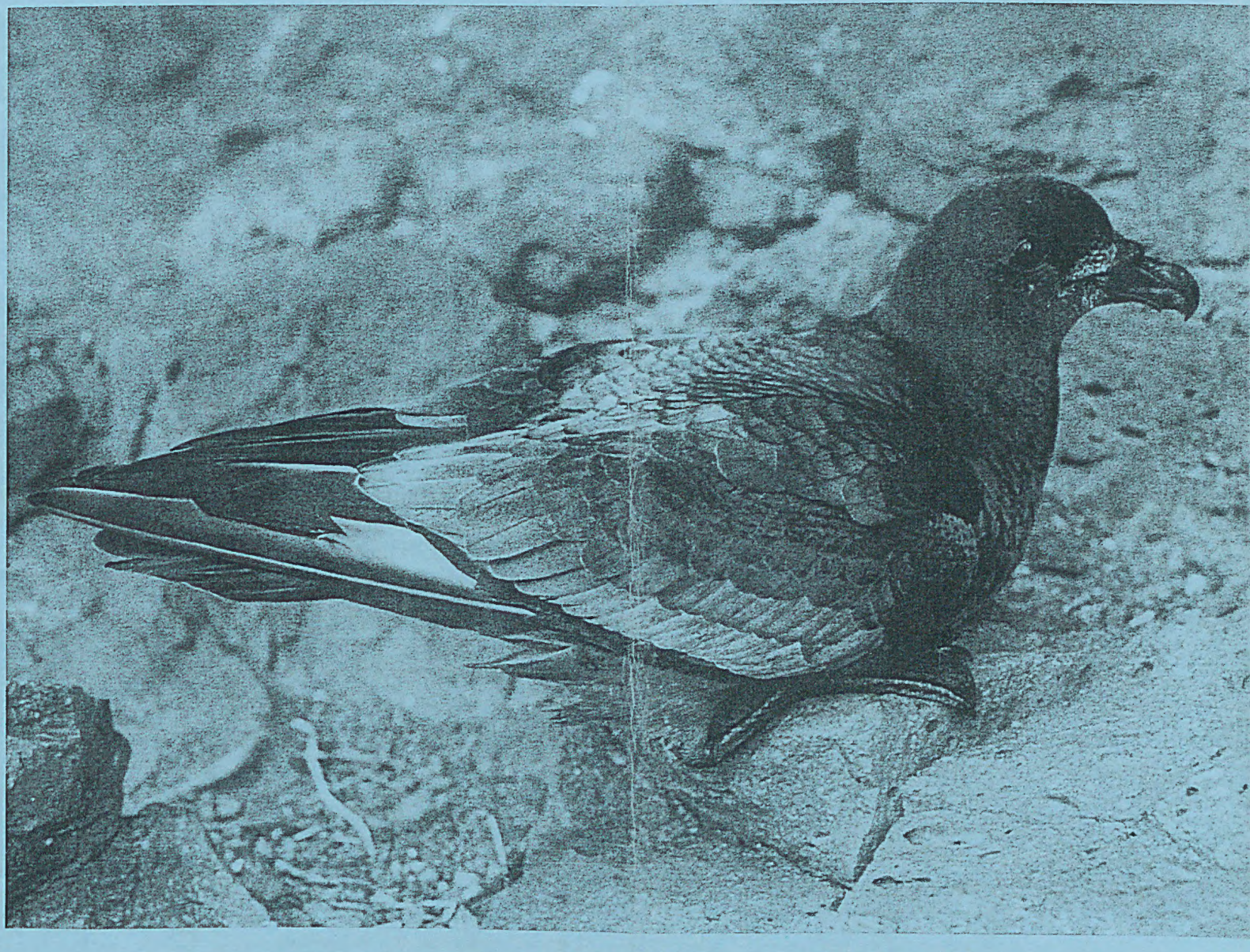

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BENDIGO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.
Address for correspondence: PO Box 396, Bendigo 3552
ISSN 0812-423X

Office Bearers for 2004 - 2005

President	Matthew Comer	46 Railway Place, Goornong	5432 2380
Senior Vice President	Stuart Fraser	12 Bambara Close, Bendigo	
Junior Vice President	vacant		
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	Jan Orr	2 Cockerel Court, Bendigo	5443 5668
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Garden Convenor/Secretary	Matthew Comer	46 Railway Place, Goornong	5432 2380
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		e-mail: s.wilkens@latrobe.edu.au	

Membership of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is open to all those interested in Natural History. The subscription rates are: Single $34; Family $40; Concession: Single $28.50; Family $34. *Whirrakee* subscription only is $34.

General meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month. The venue for General meetings is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square. The invited speaker at general meetings starts at 8:00pm and meetings conclude with supper.
If a workshop is held prior to the meeting, it will be advertised and it usually starts at 7.00pm.
The Annual Meeting is held in September.

Committee meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 7:30pm. Members of the Committee are the Office Bearer listed above and the following members: Rob Moors, Maurie Lewis, Glenise Moors, Rod Orr, Bob Ruddick, and there are 3 vacancies.

Excursions are conducted irregularly and are advertised on the diary page of the *Whirrakee*. The assembly point for excursions is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, unless otherwise specified. In addition to local excursions, campouts are held several times each year, usually coinciding with long weekends or holiday periods.

The Bendigo Field Naturalists Club has one active group that meets regularly (the Fauna Study Group) and other groups that meet at irregular intervals.

Fauna Study Group: meets on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7:30pm in the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building.
Chairman: John Burtonclay, Fadersons Lane, Mandurang (5439 5710)
Secretary: Bill Holsworth, 13 Nabilla Crs., Bendigo (5443 4063)
Equipment Officer: Maurie Lewis (0407 427179)

Bird Observers Group: This group has field excursions and the occasional lecture evening. Please consult the *Whirrakee* for details. Special bird observations should be reported to Anne Bridley 5449 3479.
To propose meetings or excursions please contact Kerrie Norris 5447 8017.

Front cover photo?...see bottom of page 2.

WHIRRAKEE

Monthly Newsletter of the Bendigo Field Naturalist Club

Vol. 26, No.5, June 2005

Whirrakee takes its name from the Whirrakee Wattle (*Acacia williamsonii*) which is virtually endemic to the Bendigo region

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Authors are responsible for the accuracy of the information they use and also for any opinions expressed in their articles.
Contributions will be included as soon as possible after they are received, although articles received more than one week after the monthly General Meeting will probably be too late for inclusion in the next issue of *Whirrakee*.
Articles in *Whirrakee* may be reproduced, but permission should be obtained from the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, and acknowledgment should be given to the author and the Club. Some back issues are still available on request.

Editor's note: It was very much of a last minute rush to fill this edition and I am very grateful to Rob Watkins for making his article available at such short notice. I will be away at the end of this month and will therefore need all material for the July edition by the 22nd June (a week earlier than usual). Rob's article should really have been saved for September, when we are planning to have a 'bird edition' just before the Bird Australia Congress in Bendigo. Some of our members are already involved in the planning of this important meeting and registration details will be available in the next Whirrakee.

Front Cover Photograph:

A Providence Petrel at Goat House Cave (Lord Howe Island) struggled right up to the feet of the person calling...see article on page 5.

Photographer: Rob Watkins

A New Book for Bendigo....
Wildlife of the Box-Ironbark Country

Wildlife of the Box-Ironbark Country
By Chris Tzaros
Published by CSIRO Publishing at an advertised cost of $39.95 plus $9.00 for postage and handling.
This book is now available. We have made a bulk purchase of books from the publishers (CSIRO) and received a discount of about 35%. We will be selling copies for $30.00 to the 18 persons that requested the book. The book will be available for collection at the June 8 General Meeting.
If you would like to buy this book through the Club, and missed placing an order, we could make an additional order if there is sufficient demand. Please send a message Bill Holsworth (5443 4063). The books will NOT be re-ordered if only a very few members want it.
The CSIRO catalogue describes the book as follows:
"The forests and woodlands of Victoria's Box-Ironbark region are one of the most important areas of animal diversity and significance in southern Australia. This book provides and overview of the ecology of the habitat and its wildlife. With detailed description of 249 species and detailed guide to where to watch the wildlife in 16 key parks and conservation reserves. 256 pages pb colour illust."

Message from Diana Collier – Club Librarian
The club has several complete sets of the *Whirrakee* available. Does anybody have a use for these or know of a place that could use them? If so, please contact Diana (her contact details are on the inside front cover).

BFNC Garden Working Bee

This year we again need regular garden working bees and they are usually held on the Saturday before each general meeting, at 9am.

The next working bee will be on **Saturday, 4th of June, 9am, however, please confirm with Matthew Comer (54322380) beforehand if you are planning to attend.**

Challenges for Bird Conservation in the 21st Century:
Birds in a Changing Environment

BIRDS AUSTRALIA SCIENTIFIC CONGRESS AND CAMPOUT
Bendigo, Victoria October 2005

Further information:
More information about the Congress, including location, accommodation and activities is available on the Congress website
http://www.birdsaustralia.com.au/congress/index.html

Are the Jackass Flat Bulokes doomed?
Author and Photographer: Clive Fisher

The bulokes (*Allocasuarina luehmannii*) of the Jackass Flat Nature Conservation Reserve lead a very precarious existence because of inappropriate human activity.

The was an *A. luehmannii* growing strongly amongst red ironbarks (*Eucalyptus tricarpa*) just outside the old Crane Street car park (since closed off from the road by a fence). During the very destructive DSE burn on April 6, 2004, this was burned to death. The dead trunk still stands there today, with its dead brown branchlets still clinging to the dead branches for all the world to see.

Just off the northern side of Crane Street, opposite the car park, was a thriving one metre tall buloke, which I first noticed early this year. On Friday April 22, 2005, I discovered that, it too, is dead. It has been broken at ground level, and is lying along the ground, with its formerly green branchlets turned brown. It may have been flattened by the wheel of a car or trailer which carried lawn cuttings which some unknown people regularly transport into this section to place carefully around the butts of the ironbarks. Before the entrance to the carpark was closed off by Parks Victoria, the southern section of the reserve was also used to dump lawn clippings.

However, last Friday, just before I discovered the little buloke dead, I noticed that the fence closing off the former car park had been destroyed. One star picket has been flattened, several others nearly so, and all the wires cut, enabling trail bikes and cars to pass though again. *(N.B. this has been fixed since).*
On Saturday April 23, I observed a trail bike being ridden along the track which begins in Jacob Street. The rider wore a blue uniform, which, I think, was a firemans's uniform and wore no helmet. It may have been a trail bike, rather than a car or trailer that killed the small buloke, but the ground is too rocky there for tracks to be left, so this is open to conjecture.

These are the inappropriate activities which have/may have contributed to the deaths of the two bulokes:
1. The deliberate burning of the reserve, which definitely destroyed the lone buloke near the former car park.
2. the inappropriate dumping of lawn clippings, which requires that a vehicle be driven into the reserve, and this vehicle possibly killed the very young buloke. At any rate, it is inappropriate in that weed seeds are often dumped in the clippings.
3. Trail bike riding in the reserve.. It may have been a trail bike which killed the little *A. luehmannii*.(see photo overleaf).

It is obvious that, unless all and sundry learn to respect the nature conservation reserve for what it is, there will be continued destruction and loss of species here.

Jackass Flat, a very special place, which is constantly under threat (see article page 4).

Providence Petrels at Lord Howe Island – April 05

Author: Rob Watkins

World Heritage listed Lord Howe Island lies 770 kms N.E. of Sydney. It is a paradise in every sense of the term. Beautiful beyond words, unspoilt by over-development and with a regulated intake of visitors, not over-crowded.

Lord Howe island (L.H.I.) has five species of birds found nowhere else. We thought you might enjoy reading of our experience with one of them, the providence petrel.

Because these birds were so easily harvested from their breeding burrows, early settlers on Norfolk Island regarded the food they provided as providence itself. Hence, the name, 'Providence' petrel. Feral pigs contributed to the demise of the birds on Norfolk Island.

In March, providence petrels begin arriving at L.H.I. where they gather in vast numbers to bond, circling the near vertical slopes of 875m Mt Gower and nearby Mt Lidgbird that dominate the island's landscape.

Early in the day, the birds concentrate their activities gliding at high speed around the many forested mountain tops, but as the day progresses, petrels work their way down to lower levels.

Our first experience with providence petrels occurred late in the day in a beach-side forest of giant banyan trees and kentia palms, in an area known as Little Island.

Under a threatening sky we stood under a beach front edge of the forest while masses of petrels made circuits low over both ocean and forest, their callings could easily be heard. After looking over both shoulders to be sure we were alone, I began shouting, definitely feeling a bigger idiot than usual. Then things began to happen!

The circling petrels responded with increased calling and the number of birds in our immediate vicinity increased.
Several birds were heard landing in the tops of nearby palm trees. Imagine our astonishment when finally one petrel came up to our feet and remained there, bleating.
Cynthia couldn't resist the temptation and rewarded the bird with a pat.

On another visit to the area, we heard the calls of a providence petrel thought to be on the ground nearby. Because the canopy of palms was so tightly packed together, only meagre light prevailed at ground level. Eventually the dark grey petrel was discovered at the entrance to a burrow where its mate was already in residence.

I began calling to see what effect this may have on the petrel, already on the forest floor. In an effort to be as close as possible to the source of the calls, the petrel clambered onto a boulder at face level and remained there bleating while only an arms length away.

No matter where we ventured the next few days' experiences with the petrels continued to crowd our minds.

Stories of similar happenings at an area known as "Goat House Cave' were sufficient for us to start pedalling our cycles in that direction.

After hours of strenuous walking on steep tracks through a magnificent forest of giant banyan trees, pandanus and palms, fixed ropes were eagerly grasped for the final, near vertical, climb.

Gasping, we eventually hauled tired bodies onto the rock shelf known as Goat House Cave, high up on a face of 777m Mt Lidgbird.

Petrels were gliding past our lofty perch at lighting speed, both level with and below our position. Red-tailed tropic birds were also active, visiting large young still to fledge from ledges on near vertical rock faces that extended into mists high above.

Although we had struggled long and hard to be amongst these birds, moments just had to be spared to relish the panorama stretched out below, comprising most of the island.
A coral fringed lagoon, palm forests meeting golden beaches, while away at the northern end of the island, a line of peaks extending almost to the Admiralty Islands on the N.E. corner.

Just being at a location commanding such a view was sufficient to keep adrenalin pumping, but the prospects of calling down birds in such a dramatic setting was another dimension altogether.

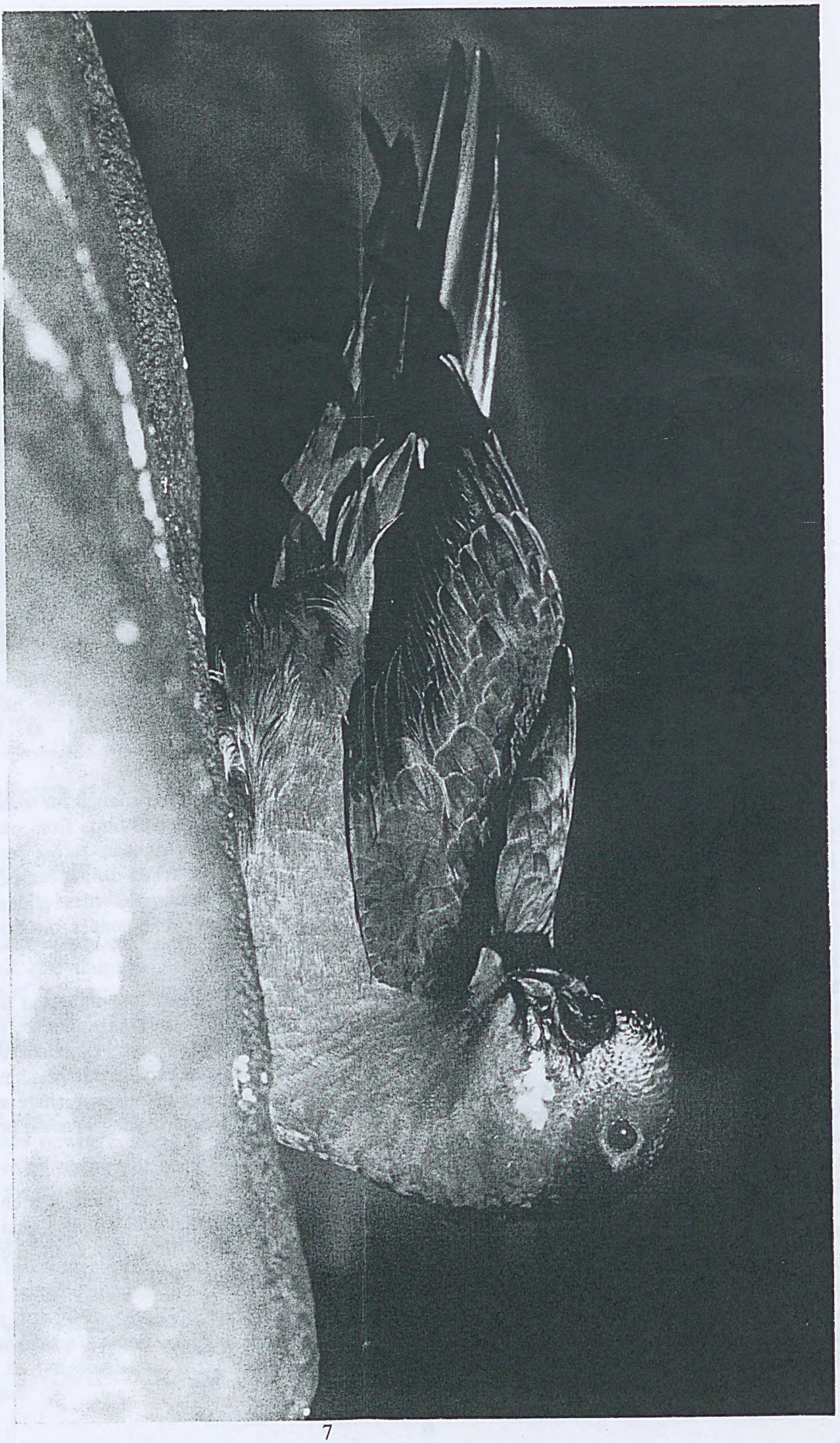
As soon as calling started, the providence petrels patterns changed. Vocalising increased and circuits were reduced to centre on our position. Soon we were aware of petrels scrambling with great effort towards us on steep slopes below. Up and up they clambered on very short legs battling their way towards us, bleating pitifully as though concerned for our welfare. As calling continued, more petrels responded, one bird colliding with Cynthia's head as it approached to land.

Near enough was not good enough for some of these beautifully marked birds from our ocean. Most struggled right up to our feet with enquiring looks. When calling ceased, the petrels departed in long, effortless glides, leaving us to marvel and ponder on this unique event.

Could it be our loud shouting indicated to them we were in pain or serious trouble?
While acknowledging that experienced observers are unable to explain this peculiar reaction by providence petrels, we share a belief the birds are experiencing concern or sympathy for the caller.

Whatever the reason, after such a rich experience, sliding down ropes and negotiating the steep track back to the bicycles seemed a small price to pay.

Photo on right: *To be as close as possible to the source of calls, the petrel clambered onto a boulder at face level*
Photographer: Cynthia Watkins



May General Meeting
Speaker: Alison Oates
Topic: Mapping native vegetation in Victoria

by Sabine Wilkens

Alison Oates has been mapping Victorian vegetation for over 12 years. She is currently employed by the Department of Sustainability and Environment to curate and update the statewide Ecological Vegetation Class (EVC) typology and mapping database.

The project that Alison mainly talked about on the night was, what seemed to be a massive mapping exercise in North-western Victoria. This project was undertaken in 2002-2003 in conjunction with the Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research (DSE) for the Mallee-Wimmera and North Central Catchment Management Authorities..

Alison started by talking about the history of EVC mapping in Victoria. This commenced statewide in the early 1990s as part of a Regional Forest Agreement.
The concept of the 'Ecological Vegetation Class' first evolved in East Gippsland during studies of Old Growth Forest.
An EVC is a vegetation group defined by floristic composition, life forms and its position in the landscape. It is assumed that there is fidelity of an EVC to a particular environment. At present there are over 200 different EVCs defined in Victoria.

Most of Victoria has now been mapped at 1:100 000 but in some areas finer detail with 1:25 000 scale has been achieved.

Examples of EVCs are, sand heathland, coastal tussock grassland, rocky outcrop shrubland, mangrove shrubland, subalpine wet heath-land etc.

Alison's project for the Mallee-Wimmera district commenced in 2002 and continued for two years.
The research team employed many methods and techniques in order to get an idea of the pre-1750 vegetation of this area. These included, studying early maps and descriptions of the area, compiling species lists from these maps and old documents, consulting local experts and old publications (e.g. from Thomas Mitchell), looking at palynological studies, reports of early settlers, pastoral workers and itinerant workers as well as parish plans and documents about early vegetation.
All of this historical evidence about what grew where and how much of it, was used to construct a pre 1750 map of the vegetation in the target area.

A current map was constructed in parallel from information gathered during plot sampling of 500 quadrats and soil samples at surface at 30cm depth. Aerial photos were compared with what was actually there (ground truthing) and climate as well as terrain and flooding regimes were noted. During this period of the project, 10 000 taxonomic records were obtained.

Altogether, 52 EVCs were mapped and described in detail. Alison explained some of the prominent ones, e.g. palaeo coastal ridges, chenopod grassland, sandstone ridge shrubland and relict floodplain.

Alison had both maps there on the night, the current map and the historical map – the result of an amazing amount of work.
As depressing as they are, comparisons like that will give a much better foundation for arguing the case for preservation of any remnant vegetation in Victoria's North-West.
Rob Watkins thanked Alison for a very interesting presentation. Hopefully this sort of work will continue elsewhere.

Environmental Auditing of Timber Production on Public Land
Prepared by Bill Holsworth, Secretary

The Environmental Protection Authority (EPA Victoria) will be conducting an audit of some Forest Management Areas near Bendigo during 20 – 24 June 2005. As part of the audit program EPA will hold an 'observation' where interested members of the public can observe the process of audit. There will be an opportunity for participants to ask questions and provide input into development of the audit program in future years.

The Bendigo Field Naturalists Club members are invited to attend but we will need to notify the EPA by June 14. You may contact Adam Beaumont, Project Manager, Forestry, EPA on 9695 2897, or forestry.audit@epa.vic.gov.au. Or you may ask Bill Holsworth to add your name to the list of BFNC members that are going to attend.

The EPA sent the Club some documentation regarding the Audit. If a sufficient number of members want to review the material and discuss it prior to the audit we can arrange an evening workshop. If only a few members want to review the material we can pass it around. Please contact Bill Holsworth or Stuart Fraser. The material is also available on the EPA website: www.epa.vic.gov.au/envaudit

Very briefly the information states that EPA Victoria is responsible for engaging an independent auditor to audit forestry operations on public land against the *Code of Forest Practice for Timber Production.* This is the first time they have conducted an audit in the Bendigo FMA. The audit focuses on DSE and VicForest's coupe management and supervision, and not on the contractor. The major aspects of the code that are audited are: log landing and dumps, roading, snig and other tracks, buffers, filters (streamside forest retention areas), habitat trees, campsites and litter. The audit of each coupe takes about 2 hours.

One area that will be of particular concern to our members is the adherence to the Code's requirement, "retention of habitat trees and old-age understorey ... and provision for replacement of old hollow-bearing trees with or around coupes..." Last year in the Central FMA the auditors found several coupes that did not comply with this requirement. Protection and marking of area exclusions was another concern with several instances of non-compliance.

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Guest Speaker Syllabus for General Meetings 2005

Second Wednesday of the month, 8:00 pm

Please check each ***WHIRRAKEE*** for additional events or changes.
The general meeting will start at 7:30pm, with the speaker being introduced at 8:00pm.

Date - 2005	Topic	Speaker
June 8	'Fungi of the Box-Ironbark forests and the Fungimap project'	Tom May (Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne)
July 13	'Co-operative breeding behaviour of tree-creepers (with particular reference to the White-browed Tree-creeper)'	Jim Radford (Research Fellow, Deakin University)
August 10	'Pink-tailed Worm-lizard, Hooded Scalyfoot and other rare reptiles'	Peter Robertson (Wildlife Consultant)
September 14 AGM	'Studies of the road edge effect in box and ironbark forest' (watch this spot – speakers and topic may still change)	Zoe Pocock and Ruth Lawrence (La Trobe University)
October 12	'Xanthorrhoea - ecology and flowering'	Mark Bellette (University of Melbourne)
November 9	'Owls of the World'	David Hollands (Wildlife Photographer)
December 14	Christmas Diner. 'The Giant Gippsland Earthworm - conservation issues'	Neville Rosengren (La Trobe University)

Diary

The General, Bird Observers Group and Fauna Study Group meetings are held at the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square, unless otherwise indicated.

General Meetings

Wednesday, June 8 7.30pm
'Fungi of the Box-Ironbark forests and the Fungimap project' will be the evening's topic. The speaker, Tom May is from the Royal Botanic Gardens in Melbourne.

Wednesday, July 13 7.30pm
Jim Radford, Research Fellow at Deakin University will talk about 'Co-operative breeding behaviour of tree-creepers (with particular reference to the White-browed Tree-creeper)'

Fauna Group

This group meets (in the clubrooms) on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7.30pm. The following is a guide for the discussion topics for this year's meetings (subject to change).

Jun 22nd - Koala
Jul 27th - Scat identification

Excursions

Every Friday morning starting at around 9 to 9:30, the Fauna Group inspects nest boxes in the Spring Gully area. The excursions are led by Maurie Lewis, 16 Vains St. Golden Square. Phone 0407 427 179 or 5442 1813. Phone Maurie to confirm exact departure times and location. If you don't phone but go directly to Maurie's house and find nobody at the house between 9 and 9:30 then the excursion is not on.

Bendigo Field Naturalists on the web

Any comments about the site are most welcome.
http://communitysites.impulse.net.au/bendigofieldnaturalists/fnats.html

BFNC Garden Working Bee

This year we again need regular garden working bees and they are usually held on the Saturday before each general meeting, at 9am.

The next working bee will be on Saturday, 4th of June, 9am, however, please confirm with Matthew Comer beforehand

Wildlife Rescue & Information Network Inc.

W.R.I.N. is an organisation dedicated to the care of orphaned, sick or injured native animals.
It is fully endorsed by the Dept of Natural Resources and Environment.
Please call our Emergency Number for Help for Fauna in Need. Phone: 0419 356433.

Research and Teaching PhD Scholarship

La Trobe University is offering one Research and Teaching PhD Scholarship to be taken up at its Mildura Campus (north-western Victoria). Mildura is a very important centre for the study of Mallee ecology and irrigated horticulture. The student will be required to undertake original research in terrestrial ecology or agroecology under the supervision of Dr Aldo Poiani. The precise nature of the project is negotiable on the basis of the student's interests and the expertise available on campus. Potential topics include: control of pest birds, role of beneficial birds in fruit orchard pest control, role of wild birds as reservoir of micropathogens, behavioural ecology of blue-faced honeyeaters, environmental impact of rotational grazing. Students with specific interests that do not match precisely those listed above are also encouraged to apply. The candidate will also have the opportunity to obtain valuable teaching experience as a Lecturer in charge of the first year subject Organisation and Function of Cells and Organisms that is dictated in semester one (6 hours/wk), whereas in semester two the candidate will be in charge of the practical sessions (3 hrs/wk) for the first year subject Genetics, Human Biology and Evolution. Student numbers are low and very manageable. The scholarship provides a stipend of $20,000 p.a.
Candidates should send preferred topic for their project, complete curriculum vitae and contact details of two referees to Dr Aldo Poiani, La Trobe University, Mildura Campus, Benetook Ave., Mildura, Victoria 3502. Ph: (03) 5051 4003, Fax: (03) 5022 0043, email: <mailto:a.poiani@latrobe.edu.au>a.poiani@latrobe.edu.au. Closing date 18 November 2005.